

Belgian group will donate a Brown County monument

By Liz Howell

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BRUSSELS — A monument will be erected in Brown County on the site of the first Belgian settlement to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the cultural exchanges.

Belgian heritage has been of international interest for the last 10 years to the Walloonie-Wisconsin Club in Belgium and the Peninsula Belgian-American Club. The clubs sponsor exchange tours to rediscover ancestors and to promote the speaking of the Belgian language, Walloon.

Josephine LeGrave Wautlet of Algoma, who published a tape course, "Phonetic Walloon for Belgian Americans," said the Walloonie-Wisconsin Club is celebrating its 10th anniversary by donating a monument to be placed in Robinsonville-Champion which was the first Belgian settlement.

"There, people still say they live 'au premier Belge' or 'at first Belgians,'" Wautlet translated from

an article in French newspaper *Le Soir* which was sent to her recently.

To rediscover ancestors in America, the program for 1985 is to research the progression of the Walloonie emigration to America and to promote the speaking of Walloon, Wautlet said, and "to make an evaluation of the experience . . . to insure perpetuity of the efforts on both sides," she translated.

Interest in her heritage and the Walloon language stemmed from her childhood on the Rosiere farm where she learned to speak Walloon before she spoke English.

"We always spoke Walloon at home because my grandfather lived with us and he never learned American," Wautlet said.

Memories of that beloved grandfather stayed with her throughout the years of teaching school, marriage, raising a family and working with her husband, Edward, on their farm in Brussels. It was not until they retired to Algoma in 1975 that she had time to do something about the Walloon she spoke

as a child.

She taught courses in Walloon for Northeast Wisconsin Technical Institute but became discouraged because her students could only get a smattering of the language in 10 classes.

"Then when I'd give another course, there'd only be 3 or 4 from the time before and I had to start all over. There was no continuity," Wautlet said.

In 1979 she contacted Conversation Institute in New York and was given permission to use its Conversational French as a guide.

Working on and off for the next few years, she finished writing and taping the course.

"It's basic Belgian meant for people going to Belgium. I've done it the way it sounds," she said about her "learn today, travel tomorrow" course.

In a trip she and Ed took to Belgium they were surprised to learn the Walloon spoken there has been influenced by French.

Another surprise was the re-



Josephine Wautlet

search the Walloonie-Wisconsin Club had done into backgrounds of visiting Americans who were "trying to renew connections with their ancestral heritage." The family who hosted the Wautlets turned out to be relatives.

"One man," Wautlet said, "learned at the end of dinner (with his hosts) that he was in his ancestral home which had been sold before his family went to America."

Because of her tape course and association with the Peninsula Belgian-American Club, Wautlet has received letters from as far away as Africa where the Kigali Rwanda Belgian Club is named "Among Ourselves" and uses the Belgian rooster as its insignia.